

## **AJUSD being Proactive Regarding MRSA**

Procedures are in place at all of the schools in the Apache Junction Unified School District to reduce the chance of any student's exposure to an antibiotic-resistant strain of staph known as MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus) or the "superbug." To date only one case of MRSA has been reported. The student is receiving appropriate treatment will not return to classes until released by the family physician.

MRSA is a problem nationwide and while only found in medical and care facilities in the past, this superbug is making an appearance in schools and other non-medical facilities. In AJUSD, District administrators decided to take a proactive approach to combating this threat. Three weeks ago, District custodians were instructed to disinfect all hard surfaces in classroom, hallways, cafeteria's, gyms and restrooms. Children are being encouraged to wash their hands and all students must use hand sanitizer before lunch.

But, in the wake of some parents being unduly alarmed, Arizona State Health officials issued information late last week to reassure parents that the chance of their students getting the lethal "superbug" is highly unlikely.

According to Dr. Rebecca Sunenshine, deputy state epidemiologist, "Most community (spread outside of a hospital) MRSA infections are skin infections, such as pimples and boils, which can often be treated without antibiotics. Only rarely does community MRSA cause serious illness, such as pneumonia or bloodstream infections, and these can be avoided with early diagnosis and treatment by a healthcare provider."

Primarily touching people who are infected spreads staph, including MRSA infections. Keeping the environment clean and disinfected is important for preventing the spread of all germs, according to the health department.

According to the letter from AJUSD officials dated October 30, 2007, "Custodians have been instructed to wipe down all hard surfaces in classrooms and common areas with disinfectant every night. Particular attention will be paid to cafeterias, gymnasiums and locker rooms."

Also cited is “athletic equipment is being disinfected daily and such items as wrestling mats are disinfected before and after each use.” The letter also states “gym towels are being laundered with bleach.”

The back of the letter sent home lists basic information about MRSA and how to prevent MRSA infection, quoting Dr. Sunenshine, recommendations that “regular hand washing” and “getting back to the basics—using soap and water, or hand sanitizer – is essential in facilities when people work, live and play close together.”

Other informational tips include keeping cuts and abrasions clean and covered with proper dressings until healed, not sharing water bottles and towels, and thorough showering procedures after athletic competition and practices.

Health officials note that these additional cleaning practices and increased awareness of hand washing might have the added benefit of helping stem the spread of colds and flu this winter as well.

For more information, see additional links on our website.